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TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [TU](#)  
SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT  
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2008

#### In Today's Papers

Football Diplomacy: President Gul Pays Historic Visit to Yerevan  
The top news story today is President Gul's weekend visit to Yerevan for the World Cup qualifying match between Turkey and Armenia. Media coverage is very positive about the meeting, with most media noting Gul's comments that the visit "tore down the psychological walls" blocking Turkey's relations with Armenia and that Gul felt he had to go to Yerevan because the invitation was "an opportunity not to be missed." Mainstream Hurriyet carries the headline, "Football Helps Mend Fences between Turkey and Armenia." Islamist-oriented Zaman reported over the weekend, "President Gul opened a new chapter in relations with Armenia when he accepted the invitation from President Sarkisian to attend the game," and calls the meeting of the two presidents "an historic turning point." In addition, the paper noted "French President Sarkozy and French Foreign Minister Kouchner praised the visit," as Sarkozy called Gul's visit "courageous" and Kouchner said "The EU is pleased." Zaman also notes "Turkey accepted the invitation to the match to show that Turkey was not responsible for creating deadlock in bilateral negotiations with Armenia," and "to show that Turkey sees a difference between the Armenian government and the Armenian Diaspora." Liberal Radikal reported the meeting "inspired hope" as the two leaders discussed their "common history and common culture." In addition, Radikal reports Georgian Foreign Minister Nalbandian told the paper, "This meeting marks the first step in the process of addressing the problems affecting relations between Turkey and Armenia," and while Armenia respects the Armenian Diaspora's views, "the Armenian government makes its own decisions regarding political issues." Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak reports President Gul "called for a discussion of dialogue, not a discussion regarding genocide." Mainstream Aksam reports, "Gul told reporters the issue of 'genocide' did not come up in the discussions between the two presidents."

President Gul also told reporters he and President Sarkisian will conduct a second round of talks soon in New York during the UN General Assembly meetings later this month. Gul emphasized that they agreed to move forward towards the resolution of their problems. President Gul also invited his Armenian counterpart to

attend a rematch game between two national teams in Turkey on Oct. 14 next year.

Some papers also gave extensive coverage to the meeting between the Turkish and Armenian foreign ministers after President Gul left Yerevan. In, "Intensive Night Shift in Yerevan," Sabah reports that Foreign Ministers Babacan and Nalbandian met 2.5 hours and discussed a wide range of issues, including developments in the Caucasus. Radikal carries an interview with Armenian Foreign Minister Nalbandian indicating his confidence the two presidents "have paved the way" toward future successful relations.

Radikal columnist Cengiz Candar agreed with Foreign Minister Nalbandian, and he wrote today: "President Gul's visit was historically important. But there has to be some concrete results to call it historic in real terms. The most imminent concrete steps should be the establishment of diplomatic ties and the opening the borders."

Taraf daily carried an interview with a retired Turkish Ambassador Volkan Vural in which he was quoted as saying "Turkey put itself in a difficult position by ignoring the events of the past. There is a problem and politicians should resolve it, not historians. The genocide claim has become an industry but Turkey should be able to apologize for the agony that Armenians experienced."

#### Editorial Commentary on Turkey-Armenia Relations

Ismet Berkan wrote in liberal-intellectual Radikal: "President Gul's visit to Armenia broke a long-standing taboo in Turkey. Now is the

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time to talk about real issues. Turkey should continue efforts to deal with our bilateral problems instead of deny them. The problems in Cyprus could have been settled right after the 1974 military intervention. ASALA terrorist acts began after Turkey failed to deal with the Cyprus issue, and PKK terrorism erupted after the ASALA problem. None of this is a coincidence. Turkey will liberate itself once it manages to release itself from the self-inflicted burdens it carries on its shoulders."

Fatih Cekirge wrote in mainstream Hurriyet: "In the aftermath of President Gul's trip to Yerevan, there are indications of a new era in relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Turkey seems to be playing the role of intermediary in this era. Gul is going to Baku soon. It will not be surprising to find the two sides discussing a new road map for the future of Karabakh."

Yasin Aktay wrote in Islamist leaning Yeni Safak: "Turkey finally realized that no progress can be achieved unless foreign policy issues are revised across the board. As Turkey skillfully accomplishes this from the EU to the Middle East and from the Caucasus to Armenia, it gets even closer to the ideal of 'peace at home and peace in the world.' President Gul made a risky and a brave decision to go to Yerevan; this decision will bring many positive consequences."

Semih Idiz observed in mainstream Milliyet: "As recent developments indicated, Azerbaijan can no longer rely on a military plan to include Karabakh in its territory. Russia will not allow such thing to happen. The developments also made clear that the U.S. will not fight against Russia for Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan is in need of political support from the U.S.-NATO axis now more than ever before. Thus, Baku should evaluate issues with a broader perspective and not overreact to Gul's visit to Yerevan any longer."

Papers: PM Erdogan Cited in Deniz Feneri Money-Laundering Case  
All media outlets report over the weekend and today that German prosecutor Kerstin Lotz says Mehmet Gurhan, a manager for the German-based Deniz Feneri charity, acknowledged that charity donations raised in Germany for tsunami victims were transferred to Prime Minister Erdogan. Weekend papers said the German prosecutor would also ask the Turkish Justice Ministry to investigate additional related charges against Radio and Television High Board (RTUK) President Zahid Akman and Kanal 7 TV managers Zekeriya Karaman, Ismail Karahan, and Mustafa Celik, who were all

shareholders in the companies set up within the framework of the organization. The suspects are accused of laundering 41 million Euros in raised donations in Germany to Turkey. The indictment claims the charity funds went to Istanbul and not to the intended recipients, who were victims of disasters in Pakistan and Darfur. Between 2003 and 2006, Deniz Feneri couriers carried 14 million Euros to Istanbul, which was allegedly given to Zederiya Karaman, manager of Islamist-oriented television channel Kanal 7, a media outlet with close ties to the AKP government. The prosecutor also said the Turkish government heavily pressured officials Germany to drop the case when the investigation into Deniz Feneri was launched.

Opposition CHP leader Deniz Baykal said "The AKP government seems to be closely linked to these charges," of money laundering. "Did you take the money or not," Baykal asked PM Erdogan. Opposition MHP deputy chairman Atilla Kaya said the claims were "very serious," adding the PM was acting with a "psychology of guilt."

PM Erdogan Targets Media Mogul in a Public Spat  
Sunday papers report Erdogan lashed out at Aydin Dogan and the media mogul's Dogan Media Group, saying Dogan launched a smear campaign against the government, the AKP, and his family because Dogan's demand for re-zoning in order to construct multi-storey residences within the compound of the Hilton Hotel in Istanbul was rejected. Erdogan told Aydin Dogan he has five days to reveal "the actual

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reason behind the media group's campaign against the government." On Sunday, Aydin Dogan accused the PM of "political blackmail" and attempting to silence the free media. "History will judge the PM who silences the free press in Turkey as a dictator," Dogan said. Mainstream Hurriyet on Sunday accused the PM of quarreling with journalists instead of taking the German indictment seriously. Mainstream Milliyet quotes several German parliamentarians of Turkish heritage who criticize Erdogan. Lale Akgun, SPD Federal Parliament lawmaker, said she "congratulates" the Dogan Group papers for "paying wide attention to the scandal," and stressed "Turkish prosecutors should cooperate with German prosecutors."

#### Editorial Commentary on Deniz Feneri Investigation

Gungor Mengi wrote in mainstream Vatan: "PM Erdogan used the last two days to curse and threaten the Dogan media group and Aydin Dogan for reporting on the "Deniz Feneri" case. He is trying to silence all media until the court case ends in Germany. Now we understand why the AKP government tried so hard to take over the Sabah-ATV media group. What lies under the PM's aggressive threats? All these threats alarm us because these threats show the powers of the state are being used incorrectly. This appears to be a case of potential future blackmail."

Mehmet Barlas wrote in mainstream Sabah: "Turkey has witnessed conflicts between politicians and the media before. In fact, public spats between Aydin Dogan and PM Erdogan are nothing new. No one has benefited from these conflicts in the past. In pluralist and liberal democracies, media figures and politicians should adopt more careful attitudes towards each other."

Mustafa Balbay in leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet: "Throughout the continuing Ergenekon investigations, PM Erdogan has pledged that underground gangs will be eliminated. The same Erdogan displays a totally different attitude regarding the Deniz Feneri investigation -- he can't even stand the reports in the papers. A considerable part of the media works, in a way, as the AKP's special media branch, like a mouthpiece of the AKP. If Erdogan rendered the Dogan Media Group ineffective, he'd have complete control over all media in Turkey. After the Constitutional Court decided not to close the AKP, it was hoped that the PM and the AKP administration would learn its lessons and act in a more balanced way, but we see that is not the case."

Six Killed in PKK Attack in Semdinli  
Sabah, Milliyet, Zaman, Cumhuriyet, Vatan, Hurriyet and others:  
Papers report that three soldiers, including a first lieutenant, and three village guards were killed in a clash between security forces

and the PKK in Semdinli, Hakkari on Sunday. Two more soldiers were slightly injured in the clash. Papers note that a large-scale operation was launched to capture the terrorists. Mainstream Sabah reports that on its web site, the Turkish General Staff stated that 9 PKK members were killed during operations last week.

Opposition Leaders Reject Meetings with Babacan  
Sabah, Milliyet, Cumhuriyet, Hurriyet, Vatan and others: Foreign Minister Ali Babacan began holding talks with political party leaders regarding the Third National Program. Sabah says Babacan met with opposition party BBP first and explained the program to the party's leader Muhsin Yazicioglu. He will meet with opposition party DSP leader Zeki Sezer today. The leaders of the CHP and MHP, the two largest opposition parties, rejected Babacan's request for an appointment. CHP leader Baykal passed the request to his deputy Onur Oymen; MHP Leader Bahceli passed the request to his deputy chairman Osman Cakir.

TV News:  
CNN Turk

Domestic News

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- Ankara Mayor Melih Gokcek confirms municipality officials inspect restaurants and shops selling alcohol, but adds the inspections were related to "safety and hygiene."

- Turkey will expand labor union freedoms within the framework of the EU harmonization process.

- Despite the high growth reported over the recent years, Turkey has made poor progress in catching up with average per capita income in EU countries.

International News

- EU Commissioner Olli Rehn told a meeting of EU foreign ministers in France Turkey's efforts for resolution of regional crises would help ease reservations about Turkey's EU membership.

- During a summit in Italy, Vice President Dick Cheney accuses Russia of selling arms to countries who support terrorists.

- John McCain and Barack Obama will visit Ground Zero in New York on Thursday to mark the seventh anniversary of the 9-11 attacks.

WILSON